

NATIONAL UNITY

AND

THE LIBERAL PARTY



AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BY

Mr. ANDREW HAYDON,
OF OTTAWA.

before the Montreal Reform Club,

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1919

National Unity and the Liberal Party

An address delivered by Mr. Andrew Haydon, of Ottawa,
before the Montreal Reform Club,
Saturday, October 11, 1919

"Andrew Haydon, of Ottawa, who acted as General Secretary of the National Liberal Convention opened the series of Saturday luncheon talks at the Montreal Reform Club last Saturday his subject being "National Unity and the Liberal Party". C. W. Taylor, president of the Club, introduced the speaker, and J.-A. Robb, M. P., for Huntingdon, and the Liberal Parliamentary whip, spoke of the work which Mr. Haydon had done towards making the convention a success."—*Montreal Gazette*.

Mr. President and Gentlemen:—I really am quite overwhelmed, and I cannot sufficiently thank you for the honor you do me today in asking me here as your guest on this occasion, and in offering me so cordial an extension of your hospitality, and also for the very kind remarks of your President. You add, I am sure, a quite undeserved compliment in thinking that I might have anything of interest to offer to this, the oldest and most powerful political Club in the country. But, before I go further, may I, Sir, repeat my thanks to those Members of the Montreal Reform Club, whose mother tongue is different from mine.

Monsieur le Président, Messieurs: — Je ne comprends pas bien la langue française. Je regrette de ne pouvoir vous adresser la parole dans cette langue, mais je désire vous dire, en français, que j'apprécie beaucoup votre bonté.

Mr. Robb is altogether too generous in his reference to my work as Secretary of the National Liberal Convention, but I shall refer to that later.

In reading the history of my country as it relates to National Unity, it appears to me, that in the past one hundred years or so, there have been three outstanding figures in our political life.

The first was an Englishman, best described in the words of Sir Wilfrid Laurier as "A LIBERAL OF THE ENGLISH SCHOOL". He came to Canada in the month of May 1838 and stayed for one short Summer, leaving again for England in November of that year. Known in private life as John George Lambton, he goes down to history among the greater statesmen of greater Britain as "THE EARL OF DURHAM".

The Second of these men was born in Scotland. Coming to Canada as a child, the most of his seventy odd years was spent in close identification with the political life and development of Canada. Familiarly known to the many thousands who idolized him in his lifetime as "JOHN A", he carries among our great Canadians the name of the RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR JOHN ALEXANDER MACDONALD.

The Third only is a son of the soil of Canada. Born in the little French Canadian hamlet of St. Lin, we have lately stood in the shadow of his passing and mourned over the loss of Canada's greatest Statesmen THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SIR WILFRID LAURIER.

Lord Durham came to this Country expecting to meet a constitutional difficulty. But to use his own language, he found instead "Two races warring in the bosom of a single state", and around this contention in the lower Province, at any rate, hinged the whole Canadian difficulty. I cannot today review the conditions of Lord Durham's time, or of the Canada he found. Suffice it to say, that, for the difficulties which he encountered throughout the Country, his solution lay, as outlined in his famous "REPORT", along the line of National Unity to be worked out in two directions,—first, by a settlement of the race differences; and second, by a form of Legislative Union, gathering together under one Government the separated Provinces.

Neither am I any further concerned today with the methods by which Durham proposed to unite either the races of the Provinces. Perhaps, in the light of later history, we would not agree with either of his plans. But I am concerned with this—that he clearly grasped the necessity for united action in both fields, for, only in this way, could he hope to see a united, happy, prosperous, and contented Canada.

Coming to the time of Sir John Macdonald, it is to be observed and the greatness of the man is measured by his attitude toward this idea of National Unity. The Union of the Provinces in 1840 following Lord Durham's time, proved all too cramped to encompass the growing idea of Canadian National Life. And so, in 1867, there was accomplished the scheme of Confederation, toward the realization of which Sir John Macdonald worked unceasingly. Notwithstanding that he repeated on many platforms, (and I heard him again state it in his last political speech at Kingston in 1891), his rather jingoistic shibboleth, "A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die," yet he never lost sight of the essential necessity for holding together the Catholic and Protestant, the Frenchman and the Englishman,—all races, and creeds, and classes—and for ruling his party accordingly.

The distinction of his leadership is soon observable by this fact, that he was not long laid away till the narrower vision, and the less skilful hand of Sir Charles Tupper, with the Remedial Bill of 1896, and a separatist attitude, broke the power and prestige of the Conservative Party.

In 1896 Sir Wilfrid Laurier came to Premiership. Except for the extension of autonomy to Alberta and Saskatchewan, and a measure of local government to the Yukon, the work of territorial consolidation was now over.

The great effort of this great man's life was devoted, through evil and through good report, toward the reconciliation of the conflicting and divergent elements in our National life. In graduating from the faculty of law at McGill University in 1864, Wilfrid Laurier as the proposer of the address of farewell said:

"Two races share today the soil of Canada. The French and the English races have not always been friends ; but I hasten to say it, and I say it to our glory, that race hatreds are finished on Canadian soil. It matters not the language the people speak, or the altars at which they kneel. . . . I pledge my honor that I will give the whole of my life to the cause of conciliation, harmony and concord amongst the different elements of this country of ours."

And so this man went on, throughout a long and distinguished career, endeavouring to complete what Durham had begun—to reconcile the differences of race and creed—to fuse the separating influences of East and West—to defeat material wickedness in high places—to destroy tariff monopoly and corporation greed and to hold for the free and equal right of every man before the law. Thus only on this broadly democratic ground did he hope to govern and guide the destinies of his loved native land. May I call this notion of National Union with recognition of individual differences the Liberal tradition, and, I might add, the only Canadian tradition worth while.

The party had an incomparable leader with a clear and high ideal, and this brings me now to a pertinent question. Did the party measure up either to the leader or to the ideal—at least in recent years ?

The time is short today, and I can only suggest. There is no doubt that in the years following 1896 the Liberal party had within its ranks powerful figures. It had come through a long period of life in the wilderness, and it had become accustomed to the gospel of work. It was the practice, for example, in my own Province of Ontario, for the Members of Parliament to go about among their constituents between sessions and to speak to the people, to mingle with them, to inspire by personal contact a renewal of the fires of Liberal thought and action, and to offer the constantly necessary advice of being ready—ever ready for the day of battle, and, as Hon. Geo. P. Graham said, when opposition leader in the Ontario House,—“More concerned to do their present duty faithfully than to vex their souls over future rewards”.

But the Liberal party in common with the whole country prospered, and prospered exceedingly. We won in 1896, again in 1900, again in 1904 and again in 1908. But as the years went by, we lost our singlemindedness. We grew rich, and careless, we neglected to examine our fortresses, and our artillery. The moth and rust gained entrance. Our incomparable leader could say even in his last political fight, as indeed he did say at Ottawa in 1917, "the man does not live that dominates Laurier". But a close inspection of the party ranks would reveal here and there a break in the wall. Whether because of a sinister influence from this quarter or from that, or whether through the money power or corporation control, or other weakening of the party fibre, Liberalism in the rank and file stood disorganized and ready for serious inroads by the enemy. The Liberal tradition of Unity, the thing after all in Canada most worth while, was forgotten. We failed to keep the faith; we fell short as a party of the Laurier ideal.

I cannot go into these details. But we meet with Nationalism in Quebec, and in Ontario a hopeless want of political thinking. The elections in recent years as they found expression in my own Province, will illustrate what I mean. In 1911 we should have known something of Reciprocity. Please pardon an impolite statement, but our situation in the Reciprocity campaign was, on the one hand, fairly well put by a voter not far from Ottawa when he said,—"I don't know what the damned thing is about, but I vote against it anyway; "while on the other hand we witnessed a fight in the upper Province largely based on prejudices against the French and the Catholic Church. Our party had failed to hold on high the flaming torch of unity, had failed to keep up the constant inculcation of fighting Liberal doctrine. Our ranks were vulnerable; we went down to defeat. We failed to keep the Liberal tradition. This failure, you observe, gave to our opponents the opportunity to drive a coach and four through our ranks. And more than ever did they do so in 1917, under the scope afforded by the War Times Election Act. I need not go over the story nor detail the facts. But the real history comes out again in the flaming headline of the Orange Sentinel the week after the election of 1917—"Sound the loud timbrel".

When Mr. Hocken and I were children in a little rural school in Ontario this was the first line of a well known poem of Thos. Moore set out in the Readers of the day. But let me complete the lines:

"Sound the loud timbrel
O'er Egypt's dark sea,
Jehovah hath triumphed
His people are free."

Free from what? The danger of enemy invasion? No. The danger of losing the war? No. The danger of a defeat of conscription? No. The danger of the Government's failure? No, not even that.

"Sound the loud timbrel--A crushing defeat for the Roman Catholic Hierarchy of Quebec and their allies in the other Provinces is the result of the polling on Monday".

Even the editor of the Sentinel in trying to vilify Sir Wilfrid Laurier pays this tribute to the past of our party. "When he (Laurier) assumed the leadership, Liberalism was the progressive power in Canadian politics. Whether its policy was right or wrong, and it was one with which The Sentinel did not agree in many respects, there never was any doubt that the men who composed it were men of conviction, and possessed the courage to contend for the things in which they believed".

There is truth in this statement, we are not free from the charge. As a party we wandered out into the sunny fields of forgetfulness; we failed to maintain "the vision splendid"; but no matter what anyone may say, the Leader himself kept ever in view the party's ideal of unity, but the party foundered in the bogs of blind prejudice and hopeless bigotry, and our enemies gathered in the harvest.

And this brings me to the Summer just gone by.

Before Sir Wilfrid Laurier died he had in mind a National Liberal Convention, and, through the unceasing and untiring energy of the Hon. Charles Murphy, it was realized in August of this year, how successfully or effectively you, many of you who were there, can yourselves be the judges. It was my place

in the Convention to help in carrying out what Mr. Murphy generally planned. As General Secretary of the Convention, I had an opportunity of observing at first hand the general condition of the party to come together again, and this in pursuance of the policy laid down by the general committee at its first meeting in Ottawa in the month of May.

The call issued by the Party Leader and the programme of the Convention looked to the accomplishment of three things:

- (1) The election of a leader ;
- (2) The formulation of a policy ;
- (3) The adoption of a plan for organization.

My work as Secretary gave me an opportunity of judging in how far the third object was a necessary one for the party. At the outset, it was plain that the inroad made by the Tory party under the name of Unionism was serious. But presently, efforts were made to get together, and I had some notable examples of men with strong differences sitting down with one another to arrange that representation from their localities to the Convention should be effective and complete. But I observed this, and further, I do not care to follow the question, that Québec only of all the larger Provinces was at all adequately organized. I might incidentally say that what we call the banner Province of Ontario was much the worst of all.

Now, while the Convention elected a Leader, and formulated a policy, and passed a resolution for Federal organization, its greatest result was the revival of the idea of the unity of the Liberal Party. It was politically formidable and imposing to see groups of men sitting side by side in a common hall, facing a common platform, engaged in a common cause, and in the cheerful and encouraging presence of the following distinguished leaders of Liberalism:

- The Prime Minister of British Columbia ;
- The Prime Minister of Alberta ;
- The Prime Minister of Saskatchewan ;
- The Prime Minister of Manitoba ;
- The newly elected leader of the Party in Ontario ;
- The Prime Minister of Quebec ;

The Prime Minister of New Brunswick ;
The Prime Minister of Nova Scotia ;
The newly elected Leader in Prince Edward Island,—now
the Prime Minister of that Province.

The meetings—the speeches—the personal association—the exchange of views—all these things and more sent the delegates home with the idea once again renewed and aroused that not in separation, but in union and unity lies the hope of the future. Even if, in some other respects the Convention had not been the success it undoubtedly was, the revival of the notion of unity was altogether worth while. It served as a new starting point for effort to accentuate first things,—work, principles, democracy in the best sense.

It would be foolish to attempt an outline of the future, but it is clear that if National Unity be an ideal worth striving for, its realization lies in a strong, virile unified Liberal Democracy altogether too busily engrossed with and concerned over great national issues to spend the days wrangling about "the language, the people speak or the altars at which they kneel".

We have a new leader, young and energetic, coming with a family tradition of fighting Liberalism. Will it not be altogether worth while, also, to fill up and consolidate the ranks behind him, and strengthen his hands toward the achievement of great things for the Party and the Nation ?

And the spirit of the departed Liberal Chieftain must be the spirit of the Party in the days to come—a spirit perfectly described by Robert Browning in his poem "Asolando" published on the day of the poet's death characteristic also, I am sure, of the Honourable Mr. King, and with this reference I close:

"One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward ;
Never doubted clouds would break ;
Never dreamed though right were worsted, wrong would
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better ; sleep to wake." [triumph ;

